





STEP B

## MENTAL MAPPING



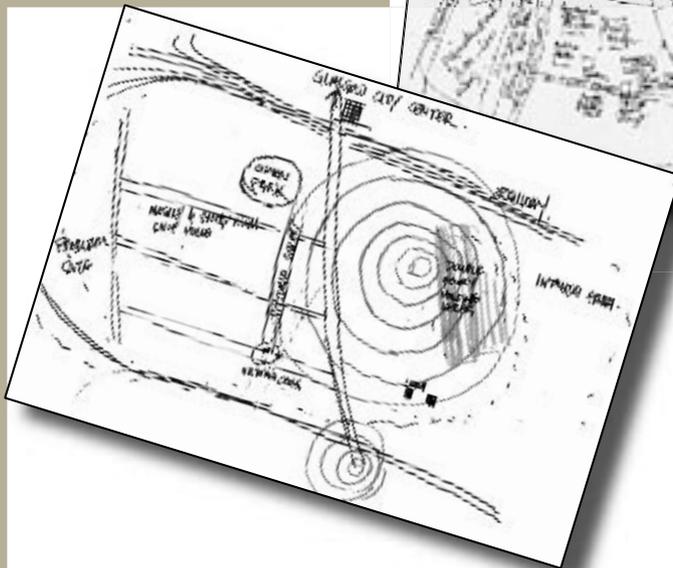
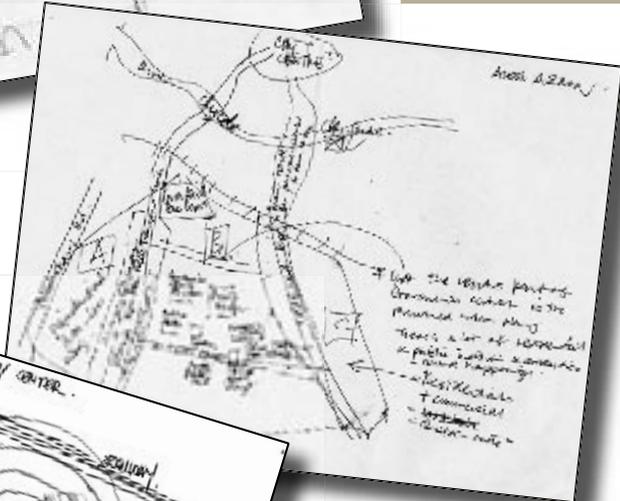
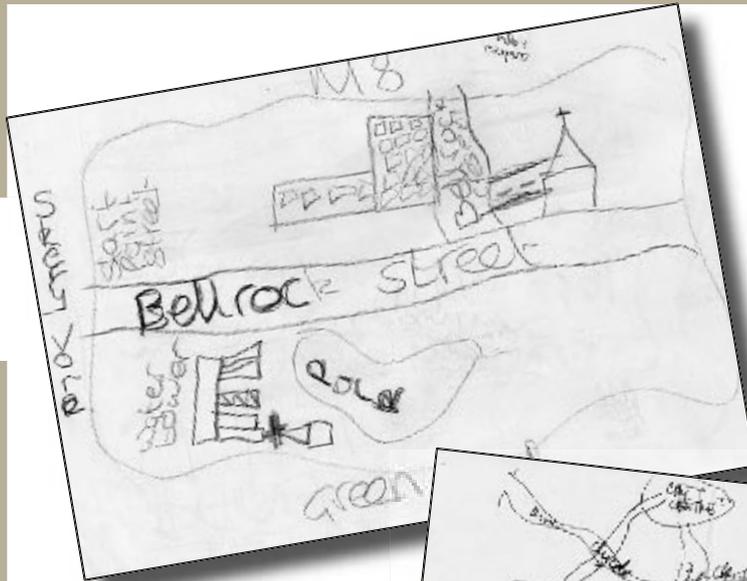
TIME: 2-3 hours.



MATERIAL: the integrated list of ideas/comments (outcome of first working session), thick coloured pens, A1 white paper (or flip-charts pages), A4, A3, thumb-pins, tape, blue tack.



PEOPLE: the working team. If you want to invite other people, you can do so.



### Mental Maps

Being personal interpretations of space, they vary greatly in style, precision and character.

# WHAT IS MENTAL MAPPING

Generally, maps are representations of spaces, distances, connections, and important features of a territory. As much maps are often used to locate a place or plan a route, space can be conceptualised our minds so that we can mentally plan or follow a route, or remember it in future.

Mental maps reveal the degree of familiarity or unfamiliarity, satisfaction or dissatisfaction with our physical environment and therefore vary considerably from person to person. These variations are caused by a number of factors such as people's age, gender, past experiences, education and training, personal interests.

Accordingly, mental maps do not just describe an area or space, they also tell us something about the people that draw such maps, their relationship with that area, with its facilities, how and why they use it or not and much more.

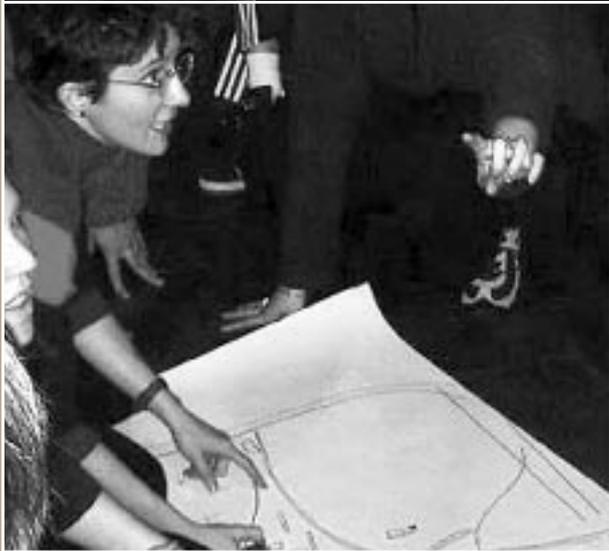
As you carry out the exercise, it is very likely that this mapping process will generate personal ideas for, and experiences and perceptions of, your area that have not been coming to the fore in the first working session. Mental Mapping therefore adds valuable information to the already existing list of ideas for - and comments on - your area.

This working session will establish the patterns of use of your area, the routes to and from significant places within it, its boundaries, its meaningful elements and features and generally its strengths and weaknesses.

Don't worry if the results are crude, sketchy or out of scale; not everyone is an artist, but we all have valuable personal experiences.

In particular, Mental Mapping may achieve the following:

- definition of territories and their boundaries;
- description of the perceived characteristics of the areas identified;
- understanding as to why different people from different age groups and backgrounds do or do not use the area;
- assistance in sharpening the goals that you already established in the first working session;
- help in locating goals and actions (identified in the previous session) in specific areas of the neighbourhood;
- a focus for future action;
- identification of any interest groups that could contribute to the discussion if they are not already part of your team.



**Mental Maps**

Use cues to get people started drawing, but do not overpower them with your own ideas.

# NOTES TO FACILITATOR

Since sketching and drawing might not be a familiar practice for some participants, use any clue they might offer you as a way to start them drawing.

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Participants will tend, in general, to mention first (or in this case to draw first) those issues they are familiar with; they will also feel more comfortable to discuss them.

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When participants run out of ideas very quickly, do not panic. Engage them in telling you a story or taking about their experience in and around the neighbourhood.

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You need to keep participants at ease in an exercise they might never have done before.

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Remember that behind each line participants draw there is an important and valid experience.

At the beginning of this exercise, when you ask participants to draw maps of their neighbourhood as they remember it, tell them that accuracy of their maps in terms of scale or exact location of things or places does not really matter; this will encourage them to get on with the exercise.

If a person won't draw, you can take the pen and draw for them a map following his or her instructions, but remember to keep your own ideas to yourself.

If it is difficult to get a response, try introducing some of the issues raised from the previous Goal Setting exercise and ask respondents to locate them within the maps they have drawn. Again, be aware that mental maps can be very different from conventional maps. For example, people will often draw a sequence of places, and generate a list of unrelated activities (see: Examples page 48).

It is important to record by whom each map has been drawn. This will enable you to discuss specific issues raised by individual maps with those persons that have generated them.

Gather participants around a table, but encourage them to work individually. Having five maps with five people's opinions will always reveal more than one map with five people's opinions.

During the first step of generating a mental map (see Creating a basic map page 46), participants will draw whatever they remember of their neighbourhood or area. Do not prompt them in any way, because this will influence them; the first map must be truly their own. For the next steps, follow the process description.

# THE PROCESS: Mental Mapping

## 1. Creating a basic map

○ 10 mins

Distribute paper and coloured pens.

Encourage team members to use specific colours to highlight specific issues, e.g. blue for secure and red for dangerous places, green for well maintained green spaces, brown for run down spaces, etc. Then ask each individual participant to draw a map of their neighbourhood as they remember it; make sure not to prompt them.

## 2. Refining the map

○ 30 mins

When the first mental maps are drawn, ask participants to incorporate the following sets of information:

**Task A** To specify what they consider the boundaries and edges of their neighbourhood to be, and to draw them into their individual maps. Boundaries are linear breaks that define areas: they can be shores, railroad cuts, the end of development against the countryside etc. Edges may be more or less impenetrable barriers inside a neighbourhood which close one area off from another (e.g. a heavy traffic artery); or they may be porous lines along which two areas are related and joined together (e.g. a traditional High Street with shops). Ask participants to think about these two features and how they can be used to describe their neighbourhood.

**Task B** Once the boundaries and edges have been included in the maps, ask participants to mark on their maps any distinctive areas, such as residential, industrial, commercial, derelict areas and open green spaces within the neighbourhood.

**Task C** Ask participants to mark the position of important buildings such as schools, shops, churches, post offices, health facilities – in short anything that they consider relevant services and facilities in their neighbourhood.

**Task D** Ask participants to draw the important routes, roads and transport links within their neighbourhood that link together the important services and facilities highlighted in Task C and connect with areas outside their neighbourhood.

Although tasks A to D organise a lot of information and details, this sequence might not suit everyone. Some participants might find it easier to start by locating places they know and then lead onto identifying boundaries and links. In that case simply list all the main items you are expecting to see in the maps, without suggesting or imposing an order for them to be drawn.

**Task E** It is now time to start 'filling in' the maps. First of all, ask your team to draw onto their maps all the information on existing



### Sketchy Maps

Even if outcomes vary in style, they can all provide useful information.

### 3. Collating the maps

○ 30 mins

conditions collected in Step 2 of the Goal Setting exercise (see page 33). Distribute the list that documented this information. Make sure that all this information is mapped with the same neutral colour (e.g. black or grey) you used in Step 2.

Then, ask the team members to locate and highlight on their maps, in a colour different from those already used, all the findings achieved through Step 5 of the Goal Setting session.

Again, make sure that the mapping reflects the findings of the previous session. If, however, at any time a new issue is raised, it should be welcomed. In this case, however, make sure that you record any new issue and update the database of Step 5 of the Goal Setting exercise.

By the end of step 2, you will have a number of sketchy accounts drawn with different skills and intentions, reflecting a variety of meanings and information.

The information gathered in the mental maps includes the characteristics of and the ideas for the neighbourhood or area under scrutiny that were generated in the Goal Setting session.

Nevertheless, it is likely – as a result of new members having joined the working team and due to the increased experience of the working team – that new arguments have come to the fore during steps 1 – 2 of the mapping exercise. This new information needs to be added to the original neighbourhood or area goals to obtain a revised and complete database, which will form the basis for the third working session. Collect all the maps and organise them according to the age group and gender of the participants so that differences of perception become clear (organise the maps into as many groups as you might think useful in your case).

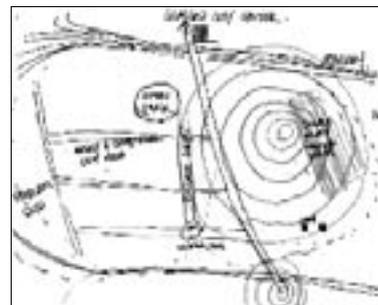
Once all the maps are 'piled' into groups, go through each of

them trying to build a new map that integrates all the detailed information contained in each individual group of maps. You might want to do so by starting marking the boundaries, the areas, the special features annotated by the team members who participated to this session. In social studies, often this collation is done by reducing each map to a similar scale and then overlapping them and marking down elements; this is a process that requires precision and equipment. Although you want some precision, you are not looking for the rigorous information a social scientist would, and therefore you can avoid this laborious process of scaling all the maps, and can collate them simply by hand.

You should be careful with scales, proportions, missing information, the prevalence of some features over others, the frequency with which elements/places have been highlighted. To record frequency for example, you can use a simple matrix where next to each feature highlighted, you list the number of times – out of the total responses – it was mentioned by participants. It is important to represent frequency also graphically in the maps.

#### Sketchy Maps

Examples of maps describing the same area by two different participants



# EXAMPLE

## 4. Summarise

○ 30 mins

To conclude the working session, return to the priorities for improvement of your area that were set in step 5 of the Goal Setting session. This time ask the group to work on the priorities for any new improvement proposals added during this current Mental Mapping session, to specify the areas that most need improvement, and the facilities that should be in your neighbourhood but are still missing.

Agree upon a number of these issues to be given priority and decide on an order of priority; add them to the Action Matrix which summarises priority areas, action statement and priorities given to them (see example page 50).

It is important that you later send information on the achievements of your working session, specifically on the classification of priority areas and the order of their importance, to all the participating community members, even those who only attended the first session, to keep them up to date.

## 5. Highlight proposals

○ 30 mins

Highlight any new proposals that arise during the Mental Mapping exercise and ask for feedback.

Contact relevant local authorities and other public bodies and discuss what you are trying to achieve (your local authority planning office can help.)

It is important to get their feedback and also for them to be aware of the team's objectives so that they can advise you on the feasibility of your programme and, where appropriate, ensure your programme is taken on board in their own plans.

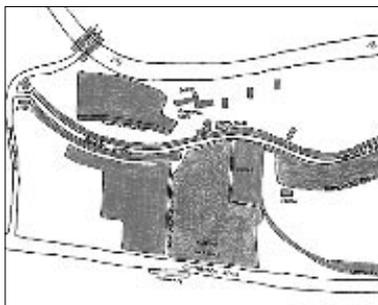
The map opposite was created by members from a Youth Project in an inner city neighbourhood. It is an example of how to "attach" ideas and impressions to places. Here, participants seemed to identify not with the whole of neighbourhood, but with only part of it.

The maps created by the Youth Project highlighted positive features – some of which are listed below:

- The local shopping centre;
- The local arts centre;
- The chip shop in the main street;
- Internet facilities in the public library;
- The neighbourhood youth project;
- Late night shop in the main street.

Some negative features identified in the map were:

- Lack of access to the shopping centre;
- Poor access to the public library;
- No access to the football pitch beside school;
- Heavy traffic through the centre of the neighbourhood.



### Colours to highlight priorities

In this case red and blue is used to highlight the participants' priorities and problem areas.



# MENTAL MAPPING ACTION MATRIX

Complete the Action Matrix to summarise priority areas identified during Goal Setting and this exercise, their strengths and weaknesses and general plans /ideas for improvement within a realistic time-scale.

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